

Avoiding Invasives in Home Landscaping, Part II: Go Native!

Are you thinking about landscaping a new home site, or renovating an existing yard? Consider using plants that are native to Wisconsin. As an urban, suburban or rural landowner, by choosing to buy and grow native plants you can be a good steward to the land, and give something back to nature.

Before European settlement in Wisconsin, prairies, wetlands, woodlands and savannas covered our landscape. Now most of these natural communities have been altered or replaced by farming, urbanization, or lost because of the interruption of natural processes such as fire. By returning native plants to the landscape you are bringing back our natural heritage.

By comparison, species of plants that are exotic, non-native or alien grow naturally in other geographic regions such as Europe or Asia and have been transported to our state to beautify our home gardens. In their native habitats, they behave themselves very nicely, but here in Wisconsin, they lack any natural checks and balances, and can thus behave very aggressively. Even cultivated varieties, which are propagated and grown to retain specific desirable characteristics such as height and leaf color, can escape the home garden. Exotics and cultivars alike can threaten our native plant communities and the wildlife that rely on them by aggressively invading and overtaking them.

What's wrong with that?

Invasive plants outcompete native species for water, nutrients, sunlight and space. As a result, invasive species can also:

- Destroy the habitats that support native fish and wildlife, thus having a negative impact on Wisconsin's hunting and fishing opportunities.
- Incur negative economic impacts on Wisconsin's forest industry by inhibiting tree seedling establishment.
- Displace native wildflowers and reduce plant diversity in our state's natural areas.
- Hybridize with native plants

Why plant native?

- Native plants are species that naturally occur and have evolved in a region, and therefore are adapted to the local environmental conditions like temperature extremes, snow, rainfall, and soil type. This means that they save gardeners time and expense, by lessening the need for watering, herbicides, and fertilizers.
- Native plants are a source of food and cover for songbirds, butterflies, turtles, frogs and toads.
- Native landscaping efficiently soaks up rainfall and consequently reduces runoff of nutrients and chemicals into our lakes and rivers.
- A native landscape is dynamic with interesting shapes, colors and textures that vary from season to season.

Table 1: Native Species Substitutes for Common Invasive Garden Plants

| Exotic Invasive Landscape Plants | Possible native substitutes |
|---|---|
| Norway maple (<i>Acer platanoides</i>) | Red maple (<i>Acer rubrum</i>) Green ash (<i>Fraxinus pensylvanica</i>) |
| Autumn olive (<i>Elaeagnus umbellata</i>) | Wild plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>) Rabbit-berry (<i>Shepherdia canadensis</i>) |
| Buckthorns (<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i> , <i>R. frangula</i>) | Black chokeberry (<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>) Arrowwood (<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>) |
| Honeysuckles (<i>Lonicera tatarica</i> , <i>L. morrowii</i> , and <i>L. x bella</i>) | Bush honeysuckle (<i>Diervilla lonicera</i>) Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier spp</i>) |
| Japanese barberry (<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>) | Common ninebark (<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>) Low-bush blueberry (<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>) |
| Burning bush (<i>Euonymus alatus</i>) | Nannyberry (<i>Viburnum lentago</i>) Black chokeberry (<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>) |
| Round-leaved bittersweet (<i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i>) | American bittersweet (<i>Celastrus scandens</i>) Trumpet Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>) |
| Groundcovers (Lily of the Valley, Bishop's Weed, Periwinkle...) | Wild ginger (<i>Asarum canadense</i>) Bunch berry (<i>Cornus canadensis</i>) Partridge berry (<i>Mitchella repens</i>) Trout lily (<i>Erythronium albidum</i>) |
| Dame's Rocket (<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>) | Wild blue phlox (<i>Phlox divaricata</i>) |
| Purple Loosestrife (<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>) | Blazing star (<i>Liatris pycnostachya</i>) Blue vervain (<i>Verbena hastata</i>) |
| Yellow Iris (<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>) | Blue flag iris (<i>Iris versicolor</i>) |
| Orange day lily (<i>Heemerocallis fulva</i>) | Turk's cap lily (<i>Lilium michiganense</i>) Wood lily (<i>Lilium philadelphicum</i>) |

Resources for more information about the plants mentioned and on native landscaping:

Wisconsin Native Plant Sources and Restoration Consultants

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/dsfm/shore/documents/nativeplants.pdf>

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/invasive/info/nurseries.htm>

Invasive Species

<http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives>

Wild Ones, Native Plants, Natural Landscapes

<http://www.for-wild.org/>

State Herbaria

<http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/WisPlants.html>

<http://www.botany.wisc.edu/wisflora/>